THE MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN

MADERA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

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COMING OF THE RAILROAD
THE BIRTH AND NAMING OF A TOWN
BERENDO

BY GUY CROW

YEAR 1872

Feb. 14 - The Snelling Argus reported that the Central Pacific railroad being built from the north was advancing southward and was then completed to a point near the Chowchilla (river) the southern boundary of Merced County.

Feb. 28 - Track was laid and the construction trains are running to the south side of Ash Slough, six miles south of the Chowchilla (river) also piles are being driven for a bridge across the Fresno River.

Approx. Mar. 5 - Track completed and trains running as far as Berendo and on March 11th track completed to the Fresno River.

It has been written that in early days thousands of antelope roamed over most of the San Joaquin Valley. Railroad officials being responsible for naming a good many of the towns along their right of way in all probability also named the town of Berendo. Berendo is a distortion of the spelling of the word "Verrendo", the Spanish word for male antelope.

In the year 1919 the U. S. Postal Department changed the name of Berendo to Berenda, the difference being that Berendo was for the male and Berenda for the female antelope.

Berendo, called into existence in June, 1872, when Leroy Dennis, a former Sheriff of what was then Fresno County, erected a store and hotel, is still a station on the Southern Pacific railroad and was the terminal for the mail stage route to Buchanan and Fresno Flats. Today most of what was a real town is a relic of the past.

The U. S. post office in Berendo was created on Feb. 12, 1873, and continued until May 25, 1881, when it was discontinued. It was recreated on Nov. 11, 1881, and continued until Mar. 26, 1919, when the name was changed from Berendo to Berenda. From the official records Berendo post office was the first established post office in what is now Madera County. Following the town of Berendo came the Borden post office established on Mar. 17, 1873, Fresno Flats on Aug. 18, 1873, and the fourth being Buchanan on Sept. 19, 1873. For comparison the town of Madera was not created until the year 1876, and the post office in Madera was not established until Apr. 26, 1877, some four years later than the one in Berendo.

After the coming of the railroad modern farm life began to develop and the land around Berendo was broken up, tilled and crops planted, wheat and barley being the principal crops. As more farm land was ploughed and the grain crops increased there was the need for additional services, supplies and farming equipment.

To meet the need for storage of grain there were small granaries and three large warehouses built by different persons living in and around Berendo.

A Mr. Joyce, the father of Joe Joyce and a large landowner in west of the town, was the first man to build a grain warehouse in Berendo which was located on the west side of the Central Pacific railroad. James W. Bearup built the second grain warehouse, also on the west side of the railroad and north of what is now the Valley Grain Drier Inc., (Pitman's) corn plant. The third warehouse was built and operated by H. A. Buchenau the father of H. J. Buchenau who now resides at the old homestead of Henry Clay Daulton. The Buchenau warehouse was located on the east side and alongside of the railroad (a side track) and just north of the Central Pacific railroad depot.

Later Mr. Joyce and Jim Bearup sold their warehouses to the Grange Company who carried on operations for a number of years. The Bearup warehouse was torn down a few years back but the Joyce warehouse still exists and is presently owned by the Campbell Bros., who still use it for the storage of bulk barley.

Following are the names of some of the men who owned or rented land and produced grain crops around the Berendo country: A Mr. Joyce, Thomas Desmond, Stark, Will and George Brown, brothers and partners, a Judd Brown, William and Isaac Brown, partners, Henry Dodge Crow who later owned and operated a general store in Berendo, Henry T. Crow, the son of Henry Dodge Crow, Bill Cardwell, Tom Cavin and Joe Secara, partners, Miller Dodd, John High, Russ High, Jim High and Ike High, John O'Meara, Montgomery, McCabe Bros., Loinaz, Ward, Mendoza, Drew Osborn, Lon Coffee, Hans West, M. C. Phillips, Arthur Cook, N. W. Cook and others, which no doubt I have overlooked.

Most every grain farmer would have three to four employees hired to drive the mule teams in the ploughing and seeding of the land and the harvesting of the grain crops.

A few of the mule skinners as well as the employer himself were well qualified to handle the mule teams. Quite a few of these men were from Tennessee and had had previous experience with mules in that state. The prevailing wage for a mule skinner who hired out to a grain farmer was $30.00 per month with room and board. The mule skinner furnished his own bed roll and the farmer furnished a bunk house with a number of bunk beds. After each day's hard work you could hear the mule skinners singing this ditty:

"Another day, another dollar,
skinning mules and scraping
collars." (harness collars)

As the needs were met Berendo really began to grow. Hotels were built (with dining room), general stores came into existence, blacksmith shops, a laundry, a few saloons and a much needed school house.

For those who wished or required transportation for pleasure or the necessity of getting back to their respective ranches or to the surrounding towns, there was that old livery stable where a horse and buggy could be hired for a nominal price per hour or per day. One of the livery stables was located on the west side of the track next to the Owl Saloon and was owned by John J. Vignolo. A man with one short leg by the name of Dave Henderson was the hostler at the stable working for John Vignolo.

Others who were users of the livery stables were the horse stages which operated between Berendo and Buchanan and on up into the higher country of Grub Gulch and Fresno Flats. Also for stalls and feed for the teams that were hauling copper ore from Buchanan to Berendo.

As the mines and the lumber mills developed, this of course increased the mail, both business and private, and also the passenger travel as many people were coming into Berendo to go up to the mines and the lumber mills to work.

To supply the needs the general stores had to stock groceries, clothing, household equipment, farm equipment and farm machinery.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS IN JANUARY 1965 HISTORIAN

The following answers are given, briefly, but are verified as well as we could. (Readers are welcome to challenge any or all answers.) We recommend you file these answers with the January 1965 Historian.

1. There are several "Indian Legends" about "The Devil's Post Pile." One often told is: "The Devil intended to establish his absolute right of ownership of the Sierras and fence everyone out and began chopping the posts but people came before fence could be made."

2. Gravelly Ford was an early crossing on the San Joaquin River located about five miles below Skagg's Bridge. There is no mark there today. The Gravelly Ford Canal emerges from the San Joaquin River near the old ford or crossing.

3. The "Raymond Progress" was a weekly newspaper published in Raymond, established in the latter part of 1912. One copy is in the Historical Society's file of old newspapers.

4. The first postoffice in Madera was located about where the DeWitt Drug Store is now. The first postoffice was burned to some extent during Moore's term as Postmaster.

5. B. A. Hawkins was the first Madera County Superintendent of Schools.

6. "Deke", Deacon, E. E. Moore was the first Postmaster in Madera. He was Postmaster from 1878 to 1888.

7. The "Old Chinese Cemetery" of Madera is located southwest of the Townsite of Borden, on property 150 feet east and west, 250 feet north and south, located on the southwest corner of lot #24, in "Borden Villa Tract."

8. The first newspaper in Madera County was the "Madera Mercury." It was established in 1885; E. E. Vincent was the Publisher.

9. The founder of Chowchilla was Orlando Alison Robertson. Complete story is in the Historian April, 1962.

10. How did the following receive their names?

Dairyland: This district was once a part of the Munich District (Dixieland). In 1915 the name "Dairyland" was given to the district by the United States Land Co.

Dixieland: The Dixieland area was originally a part of the Fairmead Cooperative Land Co. The settlement was called Munich and in 1914 the name was changed to "Dixieland." Mr. Winthrow and Mr. Hobbs suggested the name.

Bethel: This district was settled in 1914 and named "Bethel" in 1920, after the church of the same name was established there in 1920.

11. The first elementary school in Madera City, the Eastside School, was located where the Armory stands today on East Yosemite.

12. The first teacher of the Eastside School was a Mr. Hill. (Best we could do.)

13. A school was in the Borden District. The exact location has not been established by our research committee.

14. Captain John C. Fremont camped in Madera County in April in 1844.

15. Our research committee was unable to get information on North Fork. (Good opportunity for someone to write a good story for the Historian.)

16. Bass Lake was formerly called Crane Valley. The name was given by the Mariposa Battalion. They saw many sandhill crane there, thus Crane Valley.

17. The development of copper mines in 1863 was the major reason for the growth of Buchanan.

18. Two early railroads that crossed were the Southern Pacific and the Santa Fe. They crossed at a station called Kismet Tower. The Southern Pacific went from Berenda to Daulton and on to Raymond in 1886, the Santa Fe from Merced on south in 1891.

19. The soldiers camped in Madera in the area where the Valley Market is now located.

As has been stated previously, a Leroy Dennis erected and operated a general store in Berendo in 1872. Later Mr. John Brown also built and operated a general store, possibly in the 1880's and well into the 1890's. Following these two other general stores were built. H. A. Buchenau came to Berendo in 1891 and in 1892 took over and operated the store next to the Desmond Hotel. In 1894 Buchenau built and operated his own store, the same being located on lots 9 and 10 - block 26 and about 300 feet south of the Desmond Hotel. Shortly after Buchenau vacated the store building next to the Desmond Hotel, H. D. Crow took over the operations of this store.

H. D. Crow was the grandfather of Guy Crow, now residing at 808 West Yosemite Avenue, Madera, California. The Desmond Hotel referred to was located on lots no's. 16 and 15, block 26, town of Berendo and on the east side of the Central Pacific Railroad.

At least three hotels were built and operated in the town of Berendo prior to the year 1900. The first was built and operated by Leroy Dennis, the second one was built and operated by John Brown. Later the Brown Hotel was operated by the Loinaz family for a while and in 1897 the Gordon family took over and operated this hotel for about a year. A Mr. McCory took over the operations of this hotel from the Gordon family. Mr. Gordon, the hotel operator referred to, was the father of Virgil, John, and Irl Gordon, Artye (Gordon) Shebelut, all of Madera, California, and Millie Carpenter who lives away from Madera.

The Thos. Desmond family also built and operated a hotel in the year of 1891 at the location previously described. John J. Vignolo took over the operation of the Desmond Hotel in about 1895 or 1896.

THE PICTURE ABOVE: The general store owned and operated by Henry Dodge Crow.

THE PICTURE ABOVE: The Desmond - Vignolo Hotel - Berendo, California.

Various blacksmith shops were built and operated for the benefit of the farmers and the livery stable owners. In the early days John Brown operated a shop, and in 1890 John Vignolo operated a shop on the west side of the track. No doubt there were other shops in the earlier years.

Personal clothing and the hotel bedclothes and linens had to be washed, and to do this work there was a gray haired Irish lady (name not known) who went by the nickname of Snow-ball, who operated a laundry in a small building, located in the rear of the Vignolo Hotel.

Should I mention those places of business, cocktail lounges as they are called today, but in the early days they were just plain saloons where liquid refreshments were served to satisfy a man's thirst? No doubt Leroy Dennis, the first hotel operator, surely was able to serve his guests with a drink over the bar.

John Vignolo also operated a saloon on the west side of the tracks in the year 1890, located alongside his blacksmith shop. This was called the Owl Saloon. Others who were saloon men were Sam O'Leary, who operated the Owl Saloon following Vignolo, and later Jake Seiler, also was engaged in the saloon business.

Charlie Tann who owned and operated a blacksmith shop in Raymond before coming to Berendo, also, operated a saloon on the west side of the tracks in Berendo and was still in business in the year 1913.

In the early days all hotel men usually had a bar in connection with their hotel operations. Therefore it is presumed that the Gordon family, the Desmonds, and, for a fact, the Vignolos, did have bars along with their hotel operations.

THE PICTURE ABOVE: John J. Vignolo's saloon and blacksmith shop 1890.

SCHOOLS

The first schoolhouse in Berendo was a small frame building located south and about halfway between the present school and Berendo Creek. It has been written that Henry Miller saw the need for a school in Berendo, so he built a schoolhouse and gave it with five acres of land to the Berendo District. Up to the time of this writing, I have been unable to find any records showing where Henry Miller conveyed this property to the school district.

Later when the second school building was built at the site where the present school building stands, the original school building was purchased by H. A. Buchenau, moved up into town and placed on a lot in the rear of the Owl Saloon and was used for storage purposes.

The following is taken from the official records at the Madera County Recorder's office:

GRANTOR- Henry Miller surviving partner of the firm of Miller and Lux, for himself and for said firm, Sarah W. Miller wife of said Henry Miller and Jessie Potter, surviving executor of the last will and testament of Charles Lux, deceased, the parties of the first part and Hubert A. Buchenau, John Vignolo and Henry D. Crow, Trustees of the school district in the County of Madera, State of California, the parties of the second part. Consideration in the sum of $450.00. All of lots one (1) two (2) and three (3) in block thirty-seven (37) of the town of Berenda. Deed dated Sept. 7, 1894.

This is a copy of the deed for the property as described therein from Miller and Lux to the Berenda District. This real property is part of the real property where the present Berenda School is situated.

When time will permit the official records in Fresno County will be searched to determine whether Henry Miller did convey the original five acres of land to the Berenda District.

PICTURE ABOVE: Berendo School (second) frame building situated on block thirty-seven (37) Town of Berendo, Madera County, Calif.

YEARS	TEACHERS
1914 - 1915	Marguerite Ritchey
1913 - 1914	Marguerite Ritchey
1912 - 1913	George T. Hanscom
1911 - 1912	Mrs. Lillian Meek
1910 - 1911	Alpha Laughlin
1909 - 1910	Lillian Wood
1908 - 1909	Lillian Wood
1907 - 1908	Elizabeth Gable
1906 - 1907	Lettie Curran
1905 - 1906	Bessie Grenfell
1904 - 1905	Bessie Grenfell
1903 - 1904	Bessie Grenfell
1902 - 1903	Bessie Grenfell
1901 - 1902	Bessie Grenfell
1900 - 1901	Bessie Grenfell
1899 - 1900	Mr. B. W. Dutcher
1898 - 1899	Mr. J. G. Smale
1897 - 1898	Mr. J. G. Smale
1896 - 1897	Mr. J. G. Smale
1895 - 1896	Emma Perry
1894 - 1895	Mr. B. A. Hawkins (County Supt. Schools)
1893 - 1894	Mr. B. A. Hawkins (County Supt. Schools)

Two other teachers taught in prior years (years unknown). A Miss Brotherton and a Mrs. Bessam or Basham.

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YOSEMITE TOURISTS-BERENDO'S BOOM DAYS

The tourist travel to Yosemite Valley during the latter part of the 1870's and the first half of the 1880's was by horse stage departing from Madera. A wet winter in 1885-1886 caused apprehension that the horse stages would not be able to cross the plains in the spring in time for the tourist season. The "Yosemite Stage and Turnpike Company," operated by Henry W. Washburn, induced the Southern Pacific, through Seth Mann of San Francisco, to build a branch line from Berendo and it was projected to reach the Yosemite. The branch line was completed to Raymond and opened on May 14, 1886. This then became the rail terminus and beginning of the horse stage coach run via Grub Gulch, Ahwahnee, Miami Lodge, Fish Camp, Wawona and on into the Yosemite. The automobile stages replaced the horse stages on the run from Raymond to Wawona in 1912. The horse stages continued to run from Wawona to Yosemite up to 1915.

On July 1, 1915, the auto stages left Wawona at 9:00 A.M. bound for Yosemite and arrived at the Sentinel Hotel at 5:00 P. M.

This first run took 8 hours, fighting snow and mud most of the way. The autos used on this run were Pierce Arrows, Thomas Flyers and Locomobiles.

In the first runs from Raymond to Wawona three automobiles were used, two Pope Hartfords and one Thomas Flyer. One auto ran from Raymond to Wawona and one auto from Wawona to Raymond each day. The third auto stage would stay in Ahwahnee as an extra in case of need. From Raymond to Wawona the running time was 12 miles per hour. A portable telephone was carried by the drivers so, in case of an emergency, they could hook on to the road phone line and call for assistance.

The horse and automobile stages transported freight, mail and passengers into Yosemite during the period from 1886 to 1915. Parcel Post was added in Nov. 1912.

Of the thousands of tourists visiting Yosemite most of them went up and came back via Berendo.

These were the boom days for Berendo as this article is captioned.

PICTURE ABOVE: Auto stage - Fred Patterson driver. Wyoming Governor & Family.

It must be remembered that going back to the 1890's there were no automobiles, radio, television, skiing and boating that we enjoy today. So without these the people had to create their own way of entertaining themselves.

Dances were given, the private ones usually at the hotel and the public square dances in the Buchenau grain warehouse. The people came from far and near, driving their horses and buggies many miles to attend the warehouse dances.

Also as a diversion from their everyday toil, various sports were engaged in. To enumerate some: baseball, hunting geese, ducks and coyotes. Rabbit drives were conducted when thousands of rabbits were killed. These animals would ruin acres of grain.

Believe it or not, there was one occasion when a Berendoite hunted down and killed a mountain lion. This occurred on the railroad right-of-way three miles south of Berendo.

PICTURE ABOVE: A mountain lion and Si Anderson who killed the lion.

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